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THE
COMMISSION OF THE MINISTRY.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, SOUTHAMPTON,

JANUARY 24, 1836,

BY THE

REV. J. H. BROOKE MOUNTAIN, M.A.

PREBENDARY OF LINCOLN; RECTOR OF BLUNHAM, BEDFORDSHIRE;
VICAR OF HEMEL HEMPSTEAD, HERTS;
AND DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER.

PUBLISHED AT THE DESIRE OF A FEW FRIENDS
WHO HEARD IT.

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ON THE
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John xx. 21, 22, 23.

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.

Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.

ONE of the titles of our Lord is *Shiloh*—that is, *the sent*, the Messenger of the Covenant; the Ambassador *sent* by the Father to proclaim glad tidings of great joy to all people, and to reconcile the world to Himself. Being thus appointed the Chief Minister of the Gospel, he deputes others to the same office under him; “as my Father hath *sent* me, even so *send* I you.” There seems no other reasonable interpretation of his words than this—that as the Almighty Father had openly commissioned his well-beloved Son, and poured out His spirit upon him “without measure,” to qualify him for the work whereunto He had appointed him, “even so,” in the same manner, by the ceremony of a formal Ordination, and by the communication of the Spirit of grace and power, that Son commissioned the first human Ministers of His Holy Word,* to preach

* I entirely concur in the opinion that our Lord’s words in this text were addressed to the APOSTLES *only*; but the principle applies to all the inferior orders of the Ministry deriving their authority from Him through them.

the doctrine of Salvation, through faith in His Name, to all the nations of the world.—They were *sent* in the same manner, furnished with the same means of discharging their duty, and charged with the same errand—“as ye go, preach, “saying the kingdom of Heaven is at hand;—heal “the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead “cast out devils; freely ye have received, freely “give.”—Their first business was to preach or proclaim the approach of Christ’s Kingdom, and their next to confirm that Word with signs following;—the very same signs and miracles to which their Lord had Himself appealed as the evidences of His Mission from GOD.

In this manner Jesus Christ authorized and sanctified his Apostles, to the work of the Ministry. He chose them, out of the number who believed in Him, as the fittest for His purpose. They were not elected by the Church, but expressly by the Head of the Church, who reminded them—“*Ye* have *not chosen me*, but *I* have *chosen you.*” There is, in Holy Scripture, no trace of any other mode of appointing Ministers of the Gospel. The Deacons indeed whose office, in the first instance, was that of Overseers of the poor, were nominated by the whole body of believers, with whose alms they were intrusted; but even in this business the appointment rested with the Apostles, whose charge to the people

was, "look ye out seven men of good report,
"whom *we** may appoint over this business."

But the office of the Ministry was unconnected with this duty of charitable distribution; and was even found inconsistent with an attention to its details. The Apostles complained that their time was withdrawn from preaching and prayer to "serve tables;" and it was on this ground that they recommended the appointment of Deacons, whose very title implies the nature of the duties which they were to perform.

They who discharged this office well, St. Paul says, purchased to themselves good "degrees;" attained to a respectable station in the Church; and were frequently promoted to become Preachers of the Gospel. But the Ministers appear to have been always chosen, as well as ordained by Apostles; St. Paul "chose" Silas, when St. Barnabas "determined to take" Mark†; and the former Apostle likewise selected Timothy and Titus, whom he not only ordained, and consecrated Apostles or Bishops of his own sole authority; but he commissioned them also to "ordain elders, (presbyters, or priests,) in every "city;" and he furnished them with directions respecting the nature of those qualifications, which should guide them in *their* choice of the

* The well-known fraud of the Puritans, in misprinting this word "ye" for "we," affords a convincing evidence that the original is unansweredly on our side.

† Acts xx., 37—40.

individuals to be ordained. The Commission first delivered by Jesus Christ to his Apostles, has thus been handed down, in uninterrupted succession, to the Bishops, and through them to the Priests and Deacons of the present day ; nor do we, in the Episcopal Church, consider any Ministry as lawful, or any ordination as valid, unless it be clearly derived from this sacred source.

When our Lord had declared this principle in the manner already stated, and had formally commissioned the Apostles, he conferred on them the gift of the Spirit ; "He breathed on them, "and said, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost.' "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whosoever sins ye retain, "they are retained." These words which are still adopted in the Ordination of Priests to their sacred function, have been strangely misunderstood by those who have supposed them to convey to the Church, or even to the first Apostles, the power of pardoning sin, or of condemning sinners. "The Son of Man, "indeed, had power on earth to forgive sins ;" but it was because "the Father had committed all judgment to the Son," and "made him the judge of quick and dead." "Who can forgive sins, but God only ?" To the Apostles and to their successors was given merely that power, without which there can be no discipline

in the Church, (nor indeed in any Society); the power of Absolution, and of Excommunication;—in other words, the power of excluding offenders from the Society for the violation of its rules, and of re-admitting them, upon satisfactory evidence of their sincere repentance.

This authority to govern the Church was intrusted by our Lord to His Apostles in the words already cited, and has been by them handed down to its Governors for the maintenance of discipline—"for edification, and not for "destruction;" to be exercised by them "not "as having dominion over your faith, but as "helpers of your joy;" and to this legitimate power you are commanded, in the word of God, to pay a ready and willing obedience. "Remember "them who have the rule over you," says the Apostle to the Hebrews, (xiii, 7, 17,) "who have "spoken to you the word of God."—"Obey them "that have the rule over you, and submit "yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as "they that must give account."

Our Lord Himself having thus settled the constitution of His Church, and conferred on His Ministers the powers necessary for its continuance and government, "ascended up "where he was before," and left them to the guidance of that Holy Spirit, who "giveth light "and understanding to the simple;"—No further commission can be obtained *immediately* from

Him who “now sitteth at the right hand of God ;” the power of ordaining Ministers, of authorising them to preach, of superintending their discharge of duty, and overseeing the whole flock of Christ, rests with that succession of Bishops who have ruled the Church since the days of the Apostles,* and whose sanction is indispensable to “the work “of the Ministry, to the edifying of the body “of Christ.”

This general principle having been laid down, a question naturally arises, how far the duty of obedience is affected by the cessation of inspiration;—for our Church, though trusting that we are still called to the Ministry by the Holy Spirit, directing our understandings and influencing our hearts, and still guided by Him in the discharge of our functions as long as we humbly seek his guidance,—rejects all pretensions to sensible calls, direct revelations, or miraculous communications from Heaven; and being thus left to the direction of the human mind, enlightened and assisted by those ordinary gifts of grace which are common to all true believers,—the Ministers and Governors of the Church are liable to error, and the Church itself is not infallible.

But, if we will look at this question without prejudice or passion, we shall surely see that the fallibility of the Church, and of its Ministers, does

* We challenge all opponents to produce evidence that any form of polity other than Episcopal, has prevailed in the Church from the days of the Apostolic men, to the era of the Reformation.

not operate to exempt the people from the duty of *legitimate* obedience; of obedience to constituted authority, and established rules, and lawful discipline;—but merely from an absolute and servile obedience.—As long as the Apostles spake the express dictates of the Holy Ghost,—as long as the Church could use such language as—“it seemeth good to the Holy Ghost, and “to us,”—there can be no doubt that *any* resistance to their commands was disobedience not to *man*, but to *God*;—but when this awful power was withdrawn, the Bishops and Pastors of the Church were to govern it by Canons, and Articles, and fixed rules; and the duty of the people became a *canonical* obedience,—an obedience, not to the will or power of man, but to the laws laid down by the whole body of the Church, and administered by its officers. Every act of authority in conformity with those laws is binding upon your consciences; but if any attempt be made to exercise an arbitrary dominion beyond them, you are entitled to refuse submission to it.

But if the cessation of miraculous gifts, and our consequent liability to error, cannot justify disobedience to authority lawfully exercised, still less can it excuse separation from the Church, and a division of the Christian body into sects and parties. Such schisms are condemned in the Word of God as deadly sins,* and denounced as cutting off the

* 1 Cor. iii. 3, xii. 12. &c. Gal. v. 20. 1 Tim. i. 20. Titus iii. 10. &c., &c.

members from the Head of the Church, and depriving them of the influence of the Spirit;* and, however unwelcome and unpopular may be the declaration of this doctrine, the plain sense of Holy Scripture forbids us to compromise it from false delicacy, or worldly timidity, or from any other motive whatever.

But,—say they who are anxious to excuse schism,—if separation from the established Church constitutes the deadly sin of schism so fearfully denounced by the Apostles, how can you justify your own separation from the Church of Rome?—The plain answer is that we did *not* separate from it.—We reformed the Church of England; we reformed many abuses which ignorance and corruption had introduced; we abolished many practices which savour of idolatry, and many more which are in direct contempt of the Word of God, and contrary to sound doctrine; and we denied the right of the Bishop of Rome to govern the whole Church by his arbitrary power, as well as the infallibility of the Church, upon which that usurpation is founded: We established the principle, to which I have before adverted, of a canonical and legal, instead of an absolute and slavish obedience; and for having done these things, the Church of England is denounced as heretical by the Church of Rome, excommunicated on earth, and declared incapable of acceptance in Heaven.

* Jude v. 19.

The separation is of *their* making, *not ours*; and we have incurred it by our adherence to the Apostolical principle that "we ought to obey GOD "rather than man."

The same argument will undoubtedly justify dissent from the Church of England, if it can be shewn that we require of our members assent to any doctrine, or conformity to any practice, which is plainly and essentially unscriptural; and if we excommunicate them for a conscientious refusal of such assent and conformity:—but unless this can be undeniably proved, I do not see how it is possible fairly to read the New Testament, and especially the Epistles of St. Paul, without entertaining that awful apprehension of the guilt and danger of separation which shook the soul of Luther in his pious work of Reformation, and, at one time, nearly unhinged his powerful mind.

Our Church is a branch of that Universal Church,—planted upon "the foundation of the "Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being "the chief corner stone;" unjustly repudiated by the Church of Rome, which is another, and as we alledge, a corrupt branch of the same Catholic stem, because we have cleansed ourselves from corruption, and restored the primitive doctrines and Worship of the Christian Faith; deserted, as we think, without any sufficient plea to excuse the schism, by all the protestant sects which sprung up amid the confusion of the Reformation, when the minds of men

became unsettled in the mighty conflict of opinions, and liberty degenerated into licentiousness and misrule.

But WE ARE NOT A SECT: we have never been separated from the Parent stem of the Primitive Church of which we form an undoubted Branch; and we cannot be separated from it by the anathemas of another Branch, nor by the encroachments of wild offsets which have sprung up from the scattered fragments of the spreading tree.

And now, if we are satisfied that we are members of a true Church; that we possess an Apostolical commission in our Ministers; that we have all the appointed means and channels of grace; all the doctrines and institutions necessary for salvation;—are we to rest contented with these advantages, and trust to them to deliver us “from “the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty “of the children of God?”—Surely no. These things are but the outward forms of introduction to the Christian Covenant,—necessary indeed and indispensable, as being “required of God in Holy Scripture,” but, of themselves, utterly vain and helpless.

The member of the Church by outward conformity will be no nearer to Heaven, till he become a member of Christ through a lively “Faith which worketh by Love;” the communicant in Sacraments grasps only an empty casket, if he

receives not with them the inestimable pearl above all price, the gift of the Holy Spirit of GOD ; the hearer of the Word preached by commissioned Ministers will not be profited, if that Word be not “mixed with faith in them that hear it;” the very purity of the reformed doctrines will be only a reproach to the professors of them, if their lives are not answerable to their professions; if they do not put away their moral as well as their doctrinal corruptions.

We must no longer endure lukewarmness in principles, nor laxity in conduct; we are assailed on every side by numberless and unrelenting enemies, from whose incessant attacks our only hope of safety is in the protection of our Almighty Head, the Lord Jesus Christ;—and that protection will only be afforded us, if we study, and labour to deserve it. Look at his declarations to the seven Churches of Asia, and behold how He has fulfilled* them all!—Those among them which He

* 1.—“A few heaps of stones, and some miserable mud cottages, occasionally tenanted by Turks, without one Christian residing there, are all the remains of ancient Ephesus.”

2.—Smyrna is still a large city, containing nearly 100,000 inhabitants, with several Greek Churches.

3.—Pirgamos still contains at least 15,000 inhabitants; of whom 1,500 are Greeks, and 200 Armenians, each of whom have a Church.

4.—Thyatira still exists embosomed in cypresses and poplars. The Greeks occupy 300 houses and the Armenians 30. Each of them have a Church.

5.—A few wretched mud huts scattered among the ruins are the only dwellings in Sardis, and form the lowly home of Turkish herdsmen who are its only inhabitants. No Christians reside on the spot.

6.—Philadelphia alone long withstood the power of the Turks and at length capitulated with the proudest of the Ottomans. Among the Greek Colonies of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect, a column in a scene of ruins. The Christians occupy 300 houses. Divine Service is performed every Sunday in five Churches. The present Bishop is a zealous Bible Christian anxious to reform the abuses of the Greek Church.

7.—Laodicea is utterly desolated, and without any inhabitant, except wolves, jackals, and foxes.—See Keith's Evidence and Arundell's Visit.

commended continue, to this day, flourishing more or less, in exact proportion to the respective commendations; those which He threatened have long since fallen, and the cities where they once flourished, have become ruins for their sake. So will it be with us. If we regard the venerable fabric of our Apostolic Church, the clear commission of our Ministry, the primitive purity of our doctrine and worship, the Holy Sacraments of our Covenant, as so many calls and incentives to a greater watchfulness against sin, a more fruitful abundance in good works; if we feel that we are deeply accountable for these blessings, and labour to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called; to let our light so shine before men, that they may glorify our Heavenly Father, and be drawn, by our example to follow Christ in the Regeneration;—if we do these things, we shall never fall; the fierceness of our enemies will only strengthen our cause, and their calumnies will add lustre to the character of our Church. But if we rest in the propriety of outward and formal things; if we value the endowments of the Church more than its doctrines, and its rank in the state rather than its honor in the presence of GOD; if we contend for its worldly privileges whilst we undermine its spiritual discipline by our loose and carnal lives; if we indulge ourselves in ease and plenty whilst means are wanted to spread the light of the Gospel, in our own land, or among kindred nations; if papists and dissenters excel us in

missionary zeal, or domestic charity;—then indeed are we “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and “blind, and naked;”—then, “because we are “lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, will our Lord spew us out of his mouth;”—Then is our ruin nigh even at the doors, and we shall fall, lamentably yet justly fall, unpitied of man, and rejected of God !

The choice is yet before us. “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your “hearts, ye double-minded.” Let us reform the worldliness, the luxury, the selfishness of our habits, and refine our zeal from the dross of party spirit, and interested motives;—let the love of Christ rule in our hearts, and become the source of all our sentiments, the guide of all our actions; let it be for His sake, and for the sake of men’s souls, whom He died to redeem, that we love and maintain the Church of our Fathers, and defend the altars of the Protestant Faith. Let us defend them in a truly Christian spirit—a spirit of invincible courage without animosity, of unflinching firmness without obstinacy, of ardent zeal without rashness, of holy confidence without presumption. Let us “study to adorn the doctrine “of God our Saviour in all things;”—and “let all “bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, “be put away from us, with all malice.” “And

"be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted,
"forgiving one another, even as GOD, for Christ's
"sake, hath forgiven you."

Now &c.

FINIS.